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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the issues and problems while looking at the trends and developments of serials publishing in Malaysia. The first section provides background; topics addressed include the country and people of Malaysia, the history of serials publishing in Malaysia, categories and formats of serials publishing, academic publications, government publications, commercial publications, and electronic resources. Collection development is discussed in the second section, including selection of Malaysian serials, cooperative serials collection projects, bibliographic control, and access to Malaysian serials. (Contains 13 notes and references.) (MES)

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MALAYSIAN SERIALS: ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

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Abstract

Analyses the issues and problems while looking at the trends and developments of serials publishing in Malaysia. Collection development, bibliographic control and accessibility of Malaysian serials; Description and evaluation of Malaysian serial publications in traditional and electronic formats

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Paper

Introduction

As Malaysia moves forward into the new millenium, its information resources are constantly being increased, slowly but surely in both the traditional and new electronic formats. These information resources are being circulated wider and further with Malaysian scholarly journals and newspapers being made available in many library collections around the world, particularly where Malay/Southeast Asian studies programmes are offered by institutions of higher learning.

The World Wide Web holds a variety of information resources from Malaysia. Electronic serial publications include online versions of most daily newspapers in the national (Malay), vernacular and English languages. Most if not all of the eleven universities in the nation make available some of their scholarly journals in their homepages. But electronic publishing is relatively new in this part of the world and changes from print-based publishing remain intermittent. Although the volume of traditional book/serial publication for local and external consumption remains relatively small, but the future will see more full-text publications available online.

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Background

The country and people

Malaysia, which lies in the heart of Southeast Asia, consists of a peninsular region referred to as West Malaysia while East Malaysia is made up of the states of Sabah and Sarawak in the island of Borneo. The population of twenty million is made up of Malays, Chinese, Indians and the indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak. Malaysia's rate of literacy is among the highest in the region (>85% adults above 15 are literate) but surveys have indicated that Malaysians have a very low reading interest.

The term Malaysian serials used in this paper refers to serials (almanacs, annuals and yearbooks, bulletins and newsletters, directories and gazettes, indexes and abstracts, journals and periodicals, law and statutes, monographic series, newspapers, patents and standards, proceedings and transactions) published in Malaysia in all the main languages spoken in the country; Bahasa Melayu (Malay), English, Chinese, and Tamil.

History of serials publishing in Malaysia

There is a dearth in the literature about the history and development of Malaysian serials publishing and collections. The Malaysian publishing industry on the whole is not an established one. Long considered a 'private concern', the industry was only recently injected with a RM (Ringgit Malaysia) 20 million publication fund by the government to gear the industry towards achieving the National Book Policy formulated in 1985 which among others emphasise the role of books (in Bahasa Melayu) as tools for intellectual, cultural and social development of the nation [1].

The earliest serial began publication in Pulau Pinang in 1806, also marking the beginning of publishing in the country. It was a weekly newspaper entitled The Government Gazette and published by A. B. Bone. Later between 1821-1822, The Malay Magazine/Bustan Arifin was published in Melaka [2]. The pre-Independence years saw Singapore as the centre for publishing in both Malay and English for markets in the (British) colonised regions of Southeast Asia. After Independence in 1959 the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP), a quasi-government body, was set up with the main objective of developing the national (Malay) language and literature. Since then the DBP has been playing its role through the publishing of numerous books and serials [3].

The scholarly publishing arms or presses of universities were usually in place with the set up of the universities (Universiti Malaya in 1962, Universiti Sains Malaysia in 1969, followed by nine others). Responsibilities included the publication of academic writings of acceptable standards in the form of books, monographs and periodicals and especially in the national language. In 1996 Universiti Kebangsaan Press was publishing 14 journals (Akademika, Sains Malaysiana, etc.) covering subjects offered by the university [4].

The early 90's saw a proliferation of newspapers and other periodicals. Mochtar Lubis attributed this to the healthy economic growth and high literacy rate. From the Survey Research Malaysia Media Index 1992, he reported 17 newspaper titles in West Malaysia, 9 in Sarawak and 7 in Sabah. Of the 17 titles, 7 were in Chinese, 4 in English, 3 in Malay (Roman) and 1 Malay Jawi and 2 Tamil. Popular periodicals were mainly of the women and home, and entertainment genres [5].

The most recent published study on Malaysian serials appeared in the Malaysian Journal of Library and Information Science. Zainab Awang Ngah looked at the coverage of Malaysian scholarly journals by some 23 international indexes and made an assessment of their visibility and characteristics [6].

Categories and formats

Publishers of Malaysian serials include universities and research institutions, government departments, corporations, professional bodies, commercial and industrial enterprises and the commercial press. Subjects cover almost all areas of human interest albeit rather inadequately. While most publications remain in the traditional print format, microform is preferred for archival backruns and CD-ROM (compact disc-read only memory) for multimedia effects and large storage data banks. As for online formats, Malaysian resources are making inroads in (World Wide) Web publishing.

Academic publications

As with the rest of the world, Malaysian universities too require their academic staff and research officers to carry out research and publish their findings. It is estimated that 400-500 academic books, 80 journals, 300 working papers and 15,000 theses and academic exercises are produced and distributed in Malaysia annually [7]. But publications that may be used as reference sources in specific fields are still inadequate and academic librarians lament the fact that scholarly publications are often delayed in their frequency cycle. Journals of professional associations on the other hand are more reliable. Among these titles are Malaysian Management Review by the Malaysian Institute of Management, Malaysian Accountant by the Malaysian Association of Certified Public Accountant and Malaysian Journal of Animal Science by the Malaysian Society of Animal Production. Other publishers of this category of serials include the national research institutes such as the Palm Oil Research Institute, Standards and Research Institute, Forest Research Institute and Rubber Research Institute.

Government publications

The Government printers Percetakan Nasional (PN) have been prolific and regular in publishing the various government documents (gazettes, law and statutes among others) and it's numerous departments' reports. Other semi official publications like staff bulletins/newsletters are published by the various departments. These exhibit more irregular publication patterns and usually offered to libraries gratis. The PN became a corporate body in 1987. Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Library in Pulau Pinang, which was one of the academic libraries with national depository status, received all publications by the PN up till this date. But with the Deposit of Library Materials Act 1986 USM Library lost this status and became one of the National Library's external depository centres instead. Most of the government publications now have to be bought out of the library budget and there grew gaps in the collection due to difficulties in obtaining some titles. But other academic libraries in the capital Kuala Lumpur have not faced similar problems. The DBP does not publish government documents but in playing its role of developing the national language and literature has published many serial titles which appear in nearly all 200 bigger libraries in the country and some overseas. Among the titles are Dewan Budaya, Dewan Ekonomi, Dewan Kosmik, Dewan Masyarakat, Dewan Sastera, Dewan Siswa and Jurnal Dewan Bahasa.

Commercial publications

Many new serial publications published commercially have emerged since the economic boom of the early 1990's. In 1994 alone there were 4,173 new serial titles (in all categories) deposited with the National Library [8]. Prominent publishing houses or media groups include the Utusan Melayu, and New Straits Times Group including Berita Publishing which contribute to much of the popular titles in the market. The commercial components of Malaysian serials published for profit include current events and newsmagazines, entertainment, fashion, women and home, sports and health periodicals. Others fall into the categories of children, humour, supernatural/horror, and religion. A magazine entitled Men's Review which appeared in 1994 was reviewed as "a cheeky entry into Malaysia's conservative publishing scene; (with) controversial issues tackled; ...(its) content seen as radical for a Malaysian audience; ... a reflection of a more tolerant Malaysian society" [9]. Other glossy

magazines followed to cater for the more effluent sector of the population.

Electronic resources

Electronic resources are now a part of the Malaysian information landscape. Some materials have appeared on CD-ROM, but more have appeared on the Internet. Malaysian serial publications on CD-ROM include Utusan Almanac, Telekom Malaysia Annual Report. The National Library has coordinated a project to create a union list of CD-ROMs available in the collections of various libraries in Malaysia. The list is available at its homepage. The National Library has also published the archival files of the National Bibliography of Malaysia on compact discs and also Indexes on CD-ROM comprising the Index to Periodicals, Index to Newspapers and Index to Conference proceedings.

Usage of the Internet by Malaysians has increased tremendously since it was first introduced. In 1996, more than 200,000 people are using the Internet, mostly looking for information on the Web. Information on the Web is increasing at a remarkable rate and Malaysian input has also increased as more and more computers are connected to the Internet. All Malaysian universities and their libraries are now on the Internet. The National library and most if not all the state libraries are too. The Jaringan Ilmu (Knowledge Network) set up in 1996 enabled online networking to foster closer cooperation between 14 state libraries and 31 government department libraries. The World Wide Web is also being exploited as a way of providing better access to Malaysian print materials. Inevitably the homepages of universities try to offer some of their publications online. University Presses include their publications in their web sites. USM has published its Perantara journal and PRN Bulletin in its web pages. The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka also exhibit portions of their serial publications online.

Newspapers available online include The New Straits Times, Berita Harian, The Star, Utusan Malaysia, Sin Chew Jit Poh, Nanyang Siang Pau, Kwong Wah Yit Poh, Overseas Chinese Daily, Dinamani Tamil Daily, Malaysia Daily News, Borneo Mail, Daily Express, Sarawak Tribune and Tamil Nesan. Since newspaper publishers are more often than not reluctant to undermine the sale of their paper products, usually only portions or short summaries of its content are available on the Web. Some may maintain electronic archival files. For the present, Web newspapers provide a way to gain quick and timely information on current events; but for in-depth research full electronic versions are needed.

The Malaysian government is also visible on the Internet with many sectors of government presented online providing various kinds of information. Several initiatives have arisen to meet the challenge of organising Malaysian Internet contents. The WWW Virtual Library Malaysia constitutes a principal gateway to Malaysian electronic information. Most of the academic libraries have created subject directories to provide links to other resources including Malaysian. A search engine called CARI provides a search facility to trace Malaysian related resources.

Collection development

Selection of Malaysian serials

The main selection sources for serials librarians are publishers notices/pamphlets, and the daily newspapers. The Malaysian National Bibliography issues usually are not received early enough to help in the selection of current periodicals. Other sources include acquisitions lists of other libraries, although fewer lists are being produced in the light of OPACs being accessible via the Internet. Yet other inadequate sources are catalogues of publishers and sample copies of journals. Generally the 400 publishers in Malaysia exhibit poor marketing efforts and there are no comprehensive sources that aid selection of Malaysian periodical titles.

Libraries also subscribe direct to serial publishers although some titles are obtained through university cooperatives, a subscription agent or newspaper vendors.

The policy statement on Malaysian serials acquisition by most academic libraries centre on academic/scholarly publications, but accept others as gift/exchange. But follow-ups are only vigorously pursued for the latter. Subscriptions are based on request from academic/professional staff and limited by budget constraints.

Although there are no published price index for Malaysian serials, using cost statistics of some 80 academic journals subscribed by USM Library during the last five years, the price has been rather stable with no marked increase in their cost. General interest and popular magazines, and the newspapers saw a price increase during the last year following the economic slowdown.

Cooperative serials collection projects

Most academic and major public libraries carry Malaysiana or local history special collections in their effort to make these available to their users. The conference of university libraries and the National Library or PERPUN (Persidangan Perpustakaan Universiti dan Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia) have carried out various projects to improve library services in Malaysia. Among these was the Union List of Serials in Malaysia last published on microfiche in 1988. The effort was coordinated by Universiti Sains Malaysia Library but discontinued with the end of the Malaysian MARC project and libraries adopting their different choices of integrated library systems. Universiti Malaya had recently undertaken to identify duplicate titles carried by these libraries and recommended that where 3 or more copies of a title were being subscribed to, then libraries concerned were encouraged to consider a cancellation so that another title may be substituted. But when access versus availability is considered especially of core journals, then the latter is favoured.

A cooperative microfilming project (SCOM) has the National Library acting as secretariat responsible to coordinate microfilming activities among libraries and relevant institutions in Malaysia to avoid duplication. Members are all academic libraries, the National Archives, Sabah State Archives, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Sarawak Museum and Sarawak Information Resource Centre. The National Library undertakes to microfilm 4 newspaper titles (Utusan/Mingguan Malaysia, Harian Metro, The Malay/Sunday Mail and Tamil Nesan), and the Universiti Sains Malaysia Library microfilms the New Straits Times, Nanyang Siang Pau, The Star, and Kwong Wah Yit Poh. The other libraries in the committee handle other titles.

Bibliographic control

Only estimate figures of Malaysian serial publications may be arrived at. In 1996 under the Deposit of Library Materials Act 1986 (Act 331) the National Library received 42,710 copies of serials, 117,459 copies of newspapers, 530 copies of conference papers. New serial titles number 332. In the same year, the National Library as a national centre for ISSN, recorded 284 numbers given to newly published serial titles [10]. In 1999 the Universiti Sains Malaysia Library subscribes to 84 Malaysian serial titles and receives 1,400 titles under its gifts/exchange programme, of which 609 titles are irregular or non-annuals. 389 titles had been deleted because of non-receipt. These mostly included in-house publications from the commercial and industrial sector. From these figures we may make an estimate that a total of at least 1,800 Malaysian serial titles are being published.

The National Library has been publishing paper-based indexes to periodicals, newspapers, and conference proceedings since 1973/74. Its digital cumulation Indexes on CD-ROM (1996) covers the Malaysian Periodicals Index 1984-June 1991, Newspaper Index 1988-June 1991, and Index to Malaysian Conferences 1988-June 1994. The Malaysian Periodicals Index covered a total of 278 journals. These were selected Malaysian periodicals deemed academic, intellectual and educational that were deposited under the provisions of the Preservation of Books Act 1966 and subsequently under the Deposit of Library Materials Act 1986. The newspaper index only covered 4 newspapers - the New Straits Times, Star, Utusan Malaysia

and Berita Harian.

Problems in handling Malaysian serials usually arise with delayed publication, change of title and lack of bibliographical tools to aid the description of serials, especially the publication date of inaugural issue. With delayed publications, follow-ups and invoicing become a hassle for serials librarians. One example of a very delayed publication is tthe Malaysian Forester with a last published date of 1991. The management of serials in most integrated library systems (including the Liber-Media used by the Universiti Sains Malaysia Library) are far from satisfactoryand sometimes manual recording are still resorted to for some serial items. Bibliographic control must be adequate because it is deemed crucial to enable bibliographic access and subsequently physical access of any print entity.

Access to Malaysian serials

Bibliographic access to serials are usually found in print or electronic indexes and abstracts. Physical access of serial publications are more often than not in libraries, whether academic, public or special. The library network in Malaysia consists of 1 National, 11 university, 135 college, 13 central (public) and 391 special libraries [11].

Within this network, there needs to be more cooperative efforts to ensure that the Malaysian published heritage in its entirety is available for the reference of future generations. Records of collections in the form of catalogues, bibliographies, checklists, or indexes should be made available to aid resource acquisitions and sharing.

Malaysiana collections abroad reside in the (US) Ohio University Centre for Malaysian Publications, the Malaysian Resource Centre (for Malay literature, language, history, politics, culture, sociology and anthropology) at The Royal Institute of Linguistics and Anthropology (KITLV) Leiden, among others. The Library of Congress cooperative acquisition programme regional office for Southeast Asia is in Jakarta although 9 Malaysian serial titles (Al Islam, Dakwah, Dewan Masyarakat, Dewan Sastera, Dwewan Siswa, Mastika, Utusan Pelajar, Wanita, Watan) in their preservation microfilming project is at the India Office.

The Australian National University in cooperation with KITLV has a web site of their Southeast Asian Serials Database, which indexes major academic and current affairs journals published in the region. Originally covering 38 Indonesian language publications, the database now has a total of 95, including Malaysian titles [12]. Another relevant web database available through library subscription is the Bibliography of Asian Studies Online by the Association for Asian Studies [13].

Conclusion

As the new millenium imminently approaches, serials publishing in Malaysia do not show signs of very significant change from the traditional print-based format to online full-text complements. But change is inevitable and the whole infrastructure of the publishing industry involving the National Book Development Council, writers, editors, publishers, printers, libraries and information centres will have to strive together to forge ahead in developing and strengthening the print-based sector while innovating in web-based publishing for the future.

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